We other Spartans: Orientalism, Occidentalism and the enemy "other" Ancient Greece and contemporary wars

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Abstract

The article deals with enemy images in east and west and their historical invention. Connecting the reader to current controversies about "Muslim bans", the article guides the reader through the nexus of power and knowledge with a particular emphasis on the discourse of Orientalism and Occidentalism.This type of discourse is retroactive, not only because of its ideological content;, it is in fact and quite directly retroactive. Above everything else, the idea that there are essential, unbridgeable differences between cultures and by extension human beings is simply false. This urge to identify us in strict opposition to others has to be resisted, firstly because it is a false polarisation and secondly because it negates the prospect of dialogue and sustainable peace.

Keywords: Muslims, Orientalism, Other, Occidentalism, Pluralism.

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Introduction

Since antiquity, the Greco-Persian wars have been a source of innumerable dramas that have animated historians and philosophers all over the world. The locations of the battles—Salamis, Marathon and above all Thermopylae—evoke emotive and rather indelible images that chime with sentiments of pride and honour, heroism and sacrifice. Scholars of gender (see recentlyStrange, Gribb, Forth, eds., 2014) have identified such emotions as quintessentially chauvinistic and "macho" and symptomatic of a flawed, patriarchal interpretation of history.Nevertheless, the Greco-Persian wars continue to fascinate a range of academics with a traditional view of antiquity and its ethos. In mainstream scholarship, this Greco-Persian dialectic has been primarily limited to warand not, for instance, to the intense cultural exchanges that created a common Greco-Persian space along the

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Eurasian plane. Edward Said (1995) famously argued that these battles of antiquity laid the foundation of the thick archives of "Orientalism"which he defined as a systematic discourse that repeatedly misrepresented the "east" as inherently stagnant and inferior. As such, the wars between the Greek city-states and the Persian empire are limited to the continuous threat of the barbarian "other", in this case personified by Persian emperors such as Xerxes who are typically depicted as ruthless tyrants. Conversely, the western "self" is likened to the civilised polis; to the ideal-type of the seemingly advanced polities governing the Greek city-states and in particular Athens.

Several other scholars (see Adib-Moghaddam, 2013, Achcar, 2006, Jackson, 2005)have noted that comparably problematic differentiations function for politicians today. There are many contemporary examples to choose from: For instance, in his bid for the presidential candidacy of the Republicans in the United States, Donald Trump (2015) asked for a 'total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States until [the] country's representatives can figure out what is going on.'As President, he has followed up his campaign pledge with executive orders banning individuals from Muslim majority countries such as Iran, Iraq and Syria from entering the United States. The former British Prime Minister, Tony Blair (2006) spoke of the fundamental difference between barbarity and civilisation in various speeches about the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. To his mind these battles were 'not a clash between civilisations' but rather a 'clash about civilisation' which he defined as the 'age-old battle between progress and reaction' (ibid.).With no reference to the violence of the colonial order that Britain extolled, Blair linked extremism in the Muslim world to a long history of conflict and defiance:

> The roots of global terrorism and extremism are indeed deep. They reach right down through decades of alienation, victimhood and political oppression in the Arab and Muslim world. ... I am not qualified to make any judgements. But as an outsider, the Koran strikes me as a reforming book, trying to return Judaism and Christianity to their origins, rather as reformers attempted with the Christian Church centuries later. ... Under its guidance, the spread of Islam and its dominance over previously Christian or pagan lands was breathtaking. Over centuries it founded an Empire, leading the world in discovery, art and culture. The standard bearers of tolerance in the

> early Middle Ages were far more likely to be found in Muslim lands than in Christian. ... By the early 20th century, after renaissance, reformation and enlightenment had swept over the Western world, the Muslim and Arab world was uncertain, insecure and on the defensive. ... Muslims began to see the sorry state of Muslim countries as symptomatic of the sorry state of Islam. Political radicals became religious radicals and vice versa. Those in power tried to accommodate the resurgent Islamic radicalism by incorporating some of its leaders and some of its ideology. The result was nearly always disastrous. The religious radicalism was made respectable; the political radicalism suppressed and so in the minds of many, the cause of the two came together to symbolise the need for change. So many came to believe that the way of restoring the confidence and stability of Islam was the combination of religious extremism and populist politics. The true enemies became "the West" and those Islamic leaders who co-operated with them (ibid.).

This account of the former Prime Ministerignores thatIslam as ideology (or Islamism) has several facets, even when it targets real and perceived western domination(Adib-Moghaddam, 2002).In fact, the forefathers of the Islamic current, luminaries such as Mohammad Abduh and Jamaladin Afghani were not anti-western per se. They criticised European imperialism for very valid reasons given that their countries were occupied and subjugated. But they mostly welcomed western culture, philosophy and freedoms. Even the Islamic revolution in Iran was not merely an Islamist anti-western event.Iranians voiced their grievances against the dependencies of the autocratic monarchy on western patronage. Their opposition was political and not merely religious.Moreover, Islamism in Iran is very different from the methods, ambitions and ideology of movements such as al-Qaeda or Daesh (or ISIS). But politicians such as Tony Blair tend to minimise complex political dynamics of the Arab and Muslim world to the appearance of Islamism as a reactionary, coherent and aggressive movement which is diametrically opposed to the “west” for no good reason. There is no account of British imperialism and the arbitrary delineation of the so called “Middle East” which was partially formalised in the Sykes-Picot agreement in 1916.“Radical Islam” is presented as a reactionary malice that is a constant threat to the values of humanity as if it is simply “there” as the manifestation of evil. So

called “Muslim countries” are reduced to victims of a seemingly coherent ideology which developed, according to Blair, out of frustration and self-pity. This argument is very close to the thesis of Bernard Lewisin his book “What went Wrong” which has been largely refuted by scholars (see furtherQureshi and Sells, eds., 2003, Said, 1997). The argument of Lewis (2002a) is almost identical to the reasoning of Blair:

> In the course of the twentieth century it became abundantly clear that things had gone badly wrong in the Middle East—and, indeed, in all the lands of Islam. Compared with Christendom, its rival for more than a millennium, the world of Islam had become poor, weak, and ignorant. The primacy and therefore the dominance of the West was clear for all to see, invading every aspect of the Muslim's public and even—more painfully—his private life (ibid.).

In the build up to the Iraq war,this analysis of Lewis merged into a prescription for war. Democrats in the so called “Middle East”, Lewis (2002b) concurs with Blair, are looking to the “west” for liberation:

> Apart from Turkey and Israel, the two countries in the region where the governments are elected and can be dismissed by the people, most of the countries of the Middle East can be divided into two groups: those with what we are pleased to call friendly governments, and therefore increasingly hostile people who hold us responsible for the oppression and depredations of those governments, and, on the other hand, those with bitterly hostile governments, whose people consequently look to us for help and liberation. The most notable of these are Iraq and Iran. In countries under dictatorship, the political joke is often the only authentic and uncensored expression of political opinion. An Iranian joke, current during the campaign in Afghanistan, related that many Iranians put signs on top of their houses, in English, with the text: "This way please!" (ibid.)

This depiction of a Muslim world in need of being “rescued” from radicalism was very useful for Blair, George W. Bush and their academic narrators to legitimate the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Their “reactionary Islam” became a convenient label to demonise a wide spectrum of enemies which had nothing to do with each other:

from the secular-Arab nationalist tyranny of Saddam Hussein, the puritanical-terror espoused by al-Qaeda and likeminded movements (such as Daesh today) to the Islamo-Shia revolutionary republic in Iran. As indicated, former US president George W. Bush (2002) framed the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq with similarly problematic themes such as civilisation, barbarity, us-versus-them, good versus evil etc. As he remarked in a central policyspeech during the build up to the Iraq war:

> We know that Iraq and the al Qaeda terrorist network share a common enemy -- the United States of America. We know that Iraq and al Qaeda have had high-level contacts that go back a decade. Some al Qaeda leaders who fled Afghanistan went to Iraq. These include one very senior al Qaeda leader who received medical treatment in Baghdad this year, and who has been associated with planning for chemical and biological attacks. We've learned that Iraq has trained al Qaeda members in bomb-making and poisons and deadly gases. And we know that after September the 11th, Saddam Hussein's regime gleefully celebrated the terrorist attacks on America. … Terror cells and outlaw regimes building weapons of mass destruction are different faces of the same evil. Our security requires that we confront both. And the United States military is capable of confronting both. … Like other generations of Americans, we will meet the responsibility of defending human liberty against violence and aggression. By our resolve, we will give strength to others. By our courage, we will give hope to others. And by our actions, we will secure the peace, and lead the world to a better day (ibid.)

No scholar in their right mind would have subsumed disparate actors such as al-Qaeda and Iraq into one category. Several studies have exposed how the Iraq war in 2003 was built on two false premises (some have called it outright lies): First, the allegation that Saddam Hussein had WMD capability as outlined by the speech of Colin Powell at the United Nations in February 2003; and second,the mirage that Iraq and al-Qaeda were linked which was convenient to turn Saddam Hussein into a culprit of the terrorist attacks on the United States on 11 September 2001 (see further Fowler, 2015). Taken together these narrative strategies had the fundamental effect to signify the friend-enemy distinction between self and other (you are

either with us or against us as Bush put it). So it remains pertinent and politically urgent to ask how and why this fundamental, romanticised distinction between the "Occidental self" and the "Oriental other"has sustained itself for such a long time. Why is it still used as a source of "identity", as a major ingredient in the making of problematic categories such as "east" and "west" which are not defined in terms of geography but coherent "civilisations" or "non-civilised barbarians"? These are some of the questions that I intend to discuss in this present research.

History as myth

The emergence of ideas, norms, and other cultural artefacts constituting mainstream "history" is always dependent upon the presence of authorities, "guild" historians who are qualified and sufficiently legitimated via institutions to write the history of the "self" and the "other", to maximise difference and to legitimate violence. Tony Blair must have read some history books about Islam to come to the conclusions that I summarised above. I doubt that he read Edward Said or Noam Chomsky and their critical views about US foreign policy in West Asia and North Africa. At least, we can argue that the argument of Blair (and Bush) is diametrically opposed to the ideas of these scholars. There is then what we may call complicity of knowledge in the exercise of power.In other words, research, in particular in the social sciences and the humanities, can always also facilitate false perceptions about other people, and their politics and culture. As we have seen, Bernard Lewis agrees with a lot of the themes Blair flagged up and vice versa. They both share similar perceptions of the contemporary Muslim world, even if they don't engage in a direct dialogue.

Historians and other scholars have repeatedly succumbed to the temptations of state power and politicians have repeatedly used their arguments for nefarious purposes. Such historians act as narrators who redefine a particular period of time or event in relation to a fictive present. They inscribe a timeless element into their narration, as if what happens is both inevitable and of endemic endurance (e.g. radical Islam has always been the enemy of progressive values).They may be called "court historians" given their close-knit entanglementswith the

state. Perhaps unconsciously, Blair picked up this methodical mechanism when he linked the political violence in Iraq and Afghanistan to a primordial and unchanging hatred of ideas such as democracy, freedom of speech and human rights. In his view, the "other" is portrayed as being ideologically blinded by decades of hatred, especially towards the United States. In this way court historians provided the fodder for the canons of antagonism towards the "other" which in turn leads to policy mistakes.

Politicians such as Tony Blair see the world in terms of ideological conflict which is why their strategic conclusions tend to be fundamentally wrong. In the case of Blair this error in judgement becomes apparent when he repeatedly insinuated (2006) that Iran may bandwagon with al-Qaeda. 'True the conventional view is that, for example, Iran is hostile to Al Qaida and therefore would never support its activities', Blair argued.'But as we know from our own history of conflict, under the pressure of battle, alliances shift and change. Fundamentally, for this ideology, we are the enemy' (ibid.). For any serious student of the region, the idea of a strategic alliance between al-Qaeda and Iran seems uneducated, even ludicrous. But in the world-view of Blair it was a possibility. His "history" of the region informed a false reading of its realities. So with the benefit of hindsight, the disastrous consequences of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan should not come as a surprise. These wars were planned by decision-makers who were uneducated in the complexities and realities of West Asia and North Africa. Theyseemed to have read flawed books and listened tothe wrong advice.As indicated, the production of knowledge tends to be infected by ideological impurities. Policy-makers are ill-equipped to reach the less polluted areas of the social sciences. Hence they are more likely to become hostage to fortune and to be culprits in humanitarian disasters which affect the lives of millions of people, such as in Iraq and Afghanistan.

I have been dealing with history as myth with a particular emphasis on contemporary examples. In order to give my argument additional analytical depth, I would have to show that knowledge in the service of power is an ancient occurrence in human relations. The most prominent example and a good starting point for our analysis is Herodotus of Halicarnassus (Bodrum, modern day Turkey) differentiation of world affairs into the Greek speaking world and the

"barbarians" beyond these confines which has been regarded as the first prominent employment of a "tribal" method at the service of a particular political interest, i.e. in this case the pan-Hellenic unification of the warring Greek city-states against the Persian empire. Herodotus was not interested in signifying some grand clash between civilisation and barbarism, but without his prominent writings the figure of the "barbarian" as "other"would not have gained such prominence at quite an early stage of human history. And as we have seen, the "barbarian other" continues to figure prominently in successive clash scenarios until today, most recently in the rhetoric surrounding the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Herodotus has been called the father of history by Cicero in the first century BC. Certainly, he assumed this title when History was institutionalised as a discipline in the modern University. Yet Herodotus' historical tracts were not only systematic in analytical terms, they were also steeped in the Greek myths of the time. He did not manage to free himself entirely from the traditions surrounding him, from the Greek Gods and their tantalising myths. It was Thucydides who perfected the art of writing "objectivised" history at a later stage. Thucydides managed to record the Peloponnesian War without adopting Herodotus' uncritical narrative style that mixed quasi-factual tale telling with fantasy and entertainment. These vices come to the fore in his descriptions of the Greco-Persian wars. It is not only that Herodotus writes in chapter 186 of the *Histories* that the Persian king Xerxes, the son of Darius, brought 5,283,220 men to the battles at Sepias and Thermopylae, who then fought 300 Spartans in a heroic battle in which the Spartan leader Leonidas distinguished himself as one of the most brave and brilliant military leaders in human history. The whole book is permeated by Greek mythology. Indeed, the battle at Thermopylae itself is presaged by the oracle of the Pythoness:

> For when the Spartans, at the very beginning of the war, sent to consult the oracle concerning it, the answer which they received from the Pythoness was, 'that either Sparta must be overthrown by the barbarians, or one of her kings must perish.' The prophecy was delivered in hexameter verse, and ran thus:
>
> 'O ye men who dwell in the streets of broad Lacedaemon!
> Either your glorious town shall be sacked by the children of
> Perseus,

Or, in exchange, must all through the whole Laconian country
Mourn for the loss of a king, descendant of great Heracles.
He cannot be withstood by the courage of bulls nor of lions
Strive as they may; he is mighty as Zeus; there is nought that
shall stay him,
Till he have got for his prey your king, or your glorious city' (Herodotus, 1996, p. 595).

The historical account of the events during the battle at Thermopylae follows the 'prophecy' of the oracle:

> So the barbarians under Xerxes began to draw nigh; and the Greeks under Leonidas, as they now went forth determined to die, advanced much further than on previous days, until they reached the more open portion of the pass. … Now they joined battle beyond the defile, and carried slaughter among the barbarians, who fell in heaps. Behind them the captains of the squadrons, armed with whips, urged their men forward with continual blows. Many were trampled to death by their own soldiers; no one heeded the dying. For the Greeks, reckless of their own safety and desperate, since they knew that, as the mountain had been crossed, their destruction was nigh at hand, exerted themselves with the most furious valour against the barbarians.
>
> By this time the spears of the greater number were all shivered, and with their swords they hewed down the ranks of the Persians; and here, as they strove, Leonidas fell fighting bravely, together with many other famous Spartans whose names I have taken care to learn on account of their great worthiness, as indeed I have those of all the three hundred. There fell too at the same time very many famous Persians: among them, two sons of Darius, Abrocomes and Hyperanthes, his children by Phratagune, the daughter of Artanes (ibid., p. 595).

"Greek" heroism and steadfastness is juxtaposed here to Persian cruelty and disorganisation. Herodotus writes history from an obviously biased disposition, one that is constituted and necessitated by the politico-cultural *zeitgeist* enveloping him. So if Herodotus can be considered the father of history, it must follow quite logically that history as a discipline was born in myth and out of ideological considerations. The oracle, the idea of the 300 Spartans fighting a heroic battle against over 5 million Persians, all of this appears unacceptable to the critical mind. Herodotus' *Histories* served the important purpose to narrate the imperial rivalry between Greece and

Persia, in favour of the former. However, from our contemporary perspective, we would consider Herodotus one of the first "organic" intellectuals who wrote in the service of a newly devised, confessional ideology.

The pan-Hellenist agenda thus signified—an early form of "identity politics"— was already introduced in 472 BC with the staging in Athens of Aeschylus's play *The Persians*. The theme of the play focused on the effect on the Persian royal family of the news of the defeat of their armies in the battle of Salamis. Aeschylus was a veteran of the battle against the Persians at Marathon, so his representation of the Greeks as free, emancipated and chivalrous in contrast to the Persian king who is shown to be hubristic, decadent, a totalitarian master of slaves, had a very particular political function. Ultimately, the historicised narration of this period, facilitated by Herodotus and later on by Xenophon (ca. 430-354 BC) in his accounts of the "Ten Thousand", was meant to solidify the boundaries between the newly established Greek "entity" and its equally imagined "Persian" competitor and to imprint this binary into the "public" consciousness. The theatrical performances had a similar purpose. Thus, the category "barbarian" became a marker of a fictitious identity, an ideological device to delineate the Greek-speaking world from the rest— not only from Persians but also from Lydians, Phrygians, Egyptians and others who were now disqualified by the emergent Hellenocentric discourse. The us-versus-them binary thus dispersed into the field of politics and society was also expressed through sexual allegories. A famous vase depicting the battle on the Eurymedian river in the early 460s BC, for instance, shows a Greek warrior advancing with an erect penis in hand towards a Persian who is bending over. An inscription on the vase identifies the Persian as "Eurymedon", after the name of the river where Cimon won a battle against the Persians. Given that homosexuality was a socially accepted practice in the Greek speaking worlds (and in parts of Persia, contemporary Iran/Iraq), he may be considered one of the first "pin-ups" exemplifying the sexually charged representation of the "other": "Eurymedon" may be the first prominent victim of the licentious passions of history (see further Coleman and Walz, eds., 1997, Hall, 1989, Harrison, ed., 2002, Isaac, 2004).

Occidentalism

Some of these early reactions towards the "other" have been touched upon by Edward Said of course. As early as in Aeschylus's *The Persians* and in *The Bacchae* of Euripides, he writes,

> a line is drawn between two continents. Europe is powerful and articulate; Asia is defeated and distant. Aeschylus *represents* Asia, makes her speak in the person of the aged Persian queen, Xerxes' mother. It is Europe that articulates the Orient; this articulation is the prerogative, not of a puppet master, but of a genuine creator, whose life-giving power represents, animates, constitutes the otherwise silent and dangerous space beyond familiar boundaries (Said, 1995, p. 57, emphasis in original).

Said investigates how this 'Orientalist vision, a vision by no means confined to the professional scholar, but rather the common possession of all who have thought about the Orient in the West', has constituted the discursive formation termed 'Orientalism' (ibid., p. 69). From the depictions of Xerxes as the leader of the "barbarians" in Aeschylus's *The Persians* to Mohammed's location in the 'eighth of the nine circles of Hell, in the ninth of the ten Bolgias of Malebolge, a circle of gloomy ditches surrounding Satan's stronghold in Hell' (ibid., p. 68) what Dante called the *seminator di scandalo e di scisma* in *Inferno*,to modern, "social-scientific" inquiries into the "Muslim mindset," Said threads through the maze of often denigrating representations of the other "Oriental" by European and (at a later stage) US American scholars.

At least since antiquity, the self-other delineation that Said emphasises has been strengthened from innumerable loci. It was not only the Greeks who started to rewrite their history, to concoct seemingly well cloistered "genealogical" territories, to invent their self in accordance with a set of myths. The Persians were equally adamant about their "special" status. For them anyone who did not believe in the fusion of cosmic, moral and political order, the precepts of Ahura Mazda (the Zoroastrian God) manifested in the Persian king of kings (*shahanshah*) was deemed "barbarous" and wicked; *anarya* or "other" as opposed to *arya* or "pertaining to ourselves" (see further Boyce, 1975 and Hartog, 1988). This attitude, expressing as it does an

undoubted sense of religiously endowed superiority, can be discerned from the cuneiform writings inscribed in the rock of a massive mountain 66 metres above ground level, the Bisitun or "place of gods" in old Persian which is situated in the Kermanshah area of today's Iran. It exhibits a relief depicting Darius' ascension to the throne of Persia, his triumph over his enemies, and his endorsement by Ahura Mazda and is supplemented by a large amount of accompanying text in the three main languages of the Persian empire: Babylonian, Old Persian, and Elamite:

> I am Darius the Great King, King of Kings, King in Persia, King of countries, son of Hystaspes, grandson of Arsames, an Achaemenian.
> Darius the King says: My father was Hystaspes; Hystaspes' father was Arsames; Arsames' father was Ariaramnes; Ariaramnes' father was Teispes; Teispes' father was Achaemenes. ... For this reason we are called Achaemenians. From long ago we have been noble. From long ago our family had been kings. ... By the favour of Ahuramazda I am King; Ahuramazda bestowed the kingdom upon me. ... These are the countries which came to me; by the favor of Ahuramazda I was king of them: Persia, Elam, Babylonia, Assyria, Arabia, Egypt, (those) who are beside the sea, Sardis, Ionia, Media, Armenia, Cappadocia, Parthia, Drangiana, Aria, Chorasmia, Bactria, Sogdiana, Gandara, Scythia, Sattagydia, Arachosia, Maka: in all, 23 provinces. ... These are the countries which came to me; by the favor of Ahuramazda they were my subjects; they bore tribute to me; what was said to them by me either by night or by day, that was done. ... This is what I did in both the second and the third year after I became king. A province named Elam became rebellious. One man named Atamaita, an Elamite – they made him chief. Thereupon I sent forth an army. One man named Gobryas, a Persian, my subject – I made him chief of them. After that, Gobryas with the army marched off to Elam; he joined battle with the Elamites. Thereupon Gobryas smote and crushed the Elamites, and captured the chief of them; he led him to me, and I killed him. After that the province became mine. ... Those Elamites were faithless and by them Ahuramazda was not worshipped. I worshipped Ahuramazda; by the favor of Ahuramazda, as was my desire, thus I did to them.

Superiority is claimed here both religiously, through the viceregency of the Zoroastrian god Ahura Mazda that Darius assumes as a source of

legitimacy, and ethnically, based on Darius' obvious bias in favour of his "Persian" subjects. Those rebellious Elamites, whose chief Darius is said to have killed, were reproached primarily because they were amongst the few non-Iranian people during that period who did not accept Ahura Mazda as their God and who rejected, by implication, the sovereignty of Darius. In turn, those Elamites who yielded to Persian suzerainty were rewarded. Cuneiform tablets from Persepolis, the ancient capital of the Achaemenid kings, suggest how these "good" Elamites received wine and food and how they offered them to the Iranian divinities. In short: the *anarya* were incorporated into the 'Persian' narrative as long as they accepted the Irano-centric sovereignty expressed therein.

Myth making, hierarchies, the privileging of the in-group (in this case "Persians") against the out-group (non-Persians) in order to express an imperial claim is not a prerogative of a particular culture. The modalities of oppression, the idea of superiority, the power of subjugation all of which have been inscribed in the archives of what I called the "clash regime", go very deep and are much more indiscriminate than it seems.[1]If one fails to account for the circularity of them, one risks overemphasising one form of hegemony over the other. In this case it has to be acknowledged, and captured analytically, that the 'other' existed for the Persians, or so it appeared to the imagination of the Persian kings and notables, whose relationship to their subjects was either hierarchical or immediately hegemonic.

It is out of this period that a particular idea of Iran emerges. Especially during times of imperial competition, this idea tended to license a discourse that was formulated from within its confines, the ideational contours of which were rendered pseudo-authentic either through religious designations (e.g. Zoroastrianism), racial factors (e.g. Iran, land of the Aryans) or linguistic delineation (e.g., the "Pahlavi" script). Some of these sentiments are fused rather brilliantly in the *shahnameh*(Book of Kings) or *namey-e bastan* (the ancient epistle) written by Ferdowsi in the eleventh century. Alexander of Macedonia is presented here as the legitimate and eldest son of the

1. The term refers to a "regime of truth", a socially invented discursive constellation, that suggests that there is an ongoing clash between 'self' and 'other' (or civilisations). It is true for those who believe in it, but upon closer inspection with a critical attitude it proves to be as factual as a mirage.

Persian emperor Darab (Darius). In other words, he is turned from conqueror to lost heir, from Macedonian invader, to Persian prince in a display of phantasmal 'historical' re-engineering. Ferdowsi, an ardent romantic and outstanding narrator, implies that a heroic figure like Alexander must have been Iranian, that this would explain his great success as a conqueror. So suggestive were Ferdowsi's tales that they continue to function as a point of reference for many contemporary Iranian nationalists, who would emphasise that the *shahnameh* is almost entirely depleted of Arabic terms and that pre-Islamic Persia is truly representative of the "Iranian-Aryan" spirit (Adib-Moghaddam, 2015).

Simply because Ferdowsi heralded Iran's pre-Islamic kings (*shahs*) does not mean that he was racially biased towards Iranians of course or even inherently anti-Arab despite his rather negative depiction of the Muslim invasion of Sassanid Iran. But he does reserve, with immense mythical and poetical vigour, a privileged position for the Iranian/Persian self that has been strong enough to function as an ingredient in the construction of Iranian identity until today. To link this paragraph to our previous argument: distinguishing the 'self' from the 'other' via historical concoctions was not the prerogative of Herodotus or Aeschylus. Such pronounced articulations of identity can also be discerned from narratives signifying the meaning of Persia or Iran, in many ways until today. None of this has turned the human condition into a perpetual "clash of civilisations" of course, but repeatedly into a war between brothers and sisters: it has created a bond of fraternity between "us" and "them" which is violently interdependent.

Thermopylae today

The reification of the "other" from all sides indicates why contemporary adherents to the idea of a clash haverecourse to an

ideationally diverse and historically "deep" regime of truth. We can know assess better why Tony Blair could claim with immense authority that there is a deep-rooted problem in the Muslim world and that we are embroiled in some"clash for civilisation" (by implication against the uncivilised "other"). A discourse such as this reinvigorates the early antecedents of the clash regime; it persistently organizszses

an archive, in which what matters is primarily identities, and permanent cultures, with all their claims to causality and "objective" validity. From this perspective, at least since the Persian-Greek wars at Marathon, Salamis and above all Thermopylae, history is the field of identity production and myth-making. That there is enough material to choose from accentuates the salience of the regime of truth thus constituted.

No regime of truth could function without the empirical inference of an archive. The power of the clash regime emanates from the salience of its constitutive discourses which are "thickened" via innumerable narratives situated within that socially engineered constellation. The particular talent of the clash disciples today is to mould these discourses together into a historical teleology. They are aided by the way history has been written in this regard. In other words, the regime of truth sustaining the clash regime today seems to emerge from "everywhere", out of the innumerable narratives accentuating exclusion which are scattered around the archives of human thought and practice, because a whole range of prominent poets, writers, academics and other elite groups have not suggested otherwise. The fact that Herodotus'assertion that at Thermopylae, a tiny Greek holding force fought a heroic battle against over five million Persians could be picked up by Lord Byron (1788-1824) in a poem written in protest of Turkish occupation of Greece in the 19th century is yet another indicator for the structural continuities I am alluding to:

The mountains look on Marathon—
And Marathon looks on the sea;
And musing there an hour alone,
I dreamed that Greece might still be free;
For standing on the Persians' grave,
I could not deem myself a slave.

A King sate on the rocky brow
Which looks o'er sea-born Salamis;
And ships, by thousands, lay below,
And men in nations;—all were his!
He counted them at break of day—
And, when the Sun set, where were they?

And where are they? and where art thou,
My Country? On thy voiceless shore
The heroic lay is tuneless now—
The heroic bosom beats no more!
And must thy Lyre, so long divine,
Degenerate into hands like mine?
'T is something, in the dearth of Fame,
Though linked among a fettered race,
To feel at least a patriot's shame,
Even as I sing, suffuse my face;
For what is left the poet here?
For Greeks a blush—for Greece a tear.
Must *we* but weep o'er days more blest?
Must *we* but weep o'er days more blest?
Must *we* but blush?—Our fathers bled.
Earth! render back from out thy breast
A remnant of our Spartan dead!
Of the three hundred grant but three,
To make a new Thermopylæ! (in Coleridge, ed., 2006)

That the myth-making apparatus in antiquity (e.g. Herodotus), could be carried over throughout the centuries (e.g. by Lord Byron), and continues to make inroads into contemporary culturethrough Hollywood blockbusters like*300*, is yet another indicator forthe structural linkages at stake here.[1] The myth of Thermopylae, or what Edgar Allan Poe called "the Glory that was Greece", has travelled a

1. The movie *300(2006)*. produced by Zack Snyder and based on the graphic novel of Frank Miller provoked protests from many quarters in Iran and beyond. The movie was criticized for depicting Persians as 'bloodthirsty, underdeveloped zombies' feeding into 'racist instincts in Europe and America'. Other film critics described it as 'a textbook example of how race-baiting fantasy and nationalist myth can serve as an incitement to total war.' See further Gary Leupp, 'A racist and insulting film: 300 vs. Iran and Herodutus', *Counterpunch*, Weekend Edition, March 31/ 1 April 2007.

long way: It can be found in a famous "rebel" poem entitled 'A Nation Once Again' written by the Irish nationalist Thomas Osborne Davis (1814-1845); it was taught in the British public school system since Victorian times and well into the twentieth century; it appears in the novels of Charles Dickens (*The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, 1870), Edward Bulwer Lytton (*Pausanias, the Spartan*, 1873) and Steven Pressfield (*Gates of Fire*, 1998); it fed into Nazi race theories on the one side and Greek resistance to Mussolini's attempt to occupy Greece in 1940-1941 on the other; and it inspired anti-Soviet propaganda movies produced by Hollywood most vividly exemplified by the Cinemascope film *The 300 Spartans* (1962) which depicted, rather typically for this particular genre, the independent Greek city-states as 'the only stronghold of freedom remaining in the then known world' (*viz.* the United States), holding out against the 'slave empire' of the Persians (*viz*. the Soviet Union).

But we have to intervene in our argument here. The myth of Thermopylae has had a rather more central function for the discourse of the "west" and the pronounced will to signify hegemony contained therein, than the "glory of Persepolis" has had for the discourse of Iran or some "Orient". The Persian empire never signified the meaning of the Orient in Asia, in the way that Thermopylae functioned for the concoction of a "western civilisation".This nationalist narrative of Iran that is premised on the mythification of the Achaemenid kings, their Aryan ideal-type, the narrative style of the *shahnameh* etc. never really developed a systematic "anti-western" connotation, or any ideological vigour that would signify the "East" in its entirety. Rather, during the rule of the Pahlavi dynasty (1925-1979) in the twentieth century and in many ways before, it served to delineate the "Persian self" from the "Arab-Muslim other" and to signify Iran's supposed natural affinity with Europe and its "Indo-European" syntax. There was immense "Occidentalist" breeding ground for such narratives to gain currency amongst the elites of the country, a whole range of nationalist myths which have survived throughout the centuries and which have been repeatedly tapped into in order to define, somewhat metaphysically, the national narrative in Iran. The Pahlavi monarchs were fascinated by the imperial history of pre-Islamic Persia, and found its historical vigour conducive to legitimate their rule. To that end, they invoked the myth that their dynasty was somehow related to

Xerxes, Cyrus and Darius, the legendary Kings of the Achaemenid Empire. Thus, Mohammed Reza Shah adopted the official title *aryamehr* or light of the Aryans, celebrated 2,500 years of Iranian monarchy in a lavish festival in Persepolis in 1971 and subsequently abandoned the Islamic solar *hegra* calendar in favour of an imperial one, suddenly catapulting Iran into the year 2535 (based on the presumed date of the foundation of the Achaemenid dynasty). In the imagination of the shah this was the beginning of a new era for Iran, an era that was meant to set the country apart from its Islamic heritage fast forwarding it to the gates of a "great civilisation" (*tamadon-e bozorg*) (see further Adib-Moghaddam, 2006, 2009).

Off just wars and unjust consequences

Out of the politicians listed in this article only Tony Blair, rather reluctantly, and Colin Powell somewhat under duress, admitted that mistakes were made, in particular with reference to the Iraq war. Learning the lesson from the period of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq requires reminding ourselves about the nexus between power and knowledge that propelled these conflicts forward. I had already listed Bernard Lewis and his adherence to the war narrative, but there are many more examples. For instance, several scholars likened the "war on terror" to the just war principles of Augustine. In this regard, for the IR scholar Jean Bethke Elshtain (2003, p. 49),'ideas about the dignity of the human person are central to American democracy because they flow directly from the religiously shaped commitment of Americans'.Elshtain, together with Francis Fukuyama and Samuel P. Huntington, signed a letter (in Roberts, 2005, p. 27) in the aftermath of 9/11 rendering that link between just war theory and the so called "war on terrorism" explicit:

> The primary moral justification for war is to protect the innocent from certain harm. Augustine, whose early fifth-century book, *The City of God* is a seminal contribution to just war thinking, argues (echoing Socrates) that it is better for the Christian as an individual to suffer harm rather than to commit it. But is the morally responsible person also required, or even permitted, to make for *other* innocent persons a commitment to non self-defense? For Augustine, and for the broader just war tradition, the answer is no. If one has compelling

> evidence that innocent people who are in no position to protect themselves will be grievously harmed unless coercive force is used to stop an aggressor, then the moral principle of love of neighbour calls us to the use of force.

From this perspective, the ultimate justification of the right to wage war, first in Afghanistan in 2001 and then in Iraq in 2003, is that it is meant to have an ordering effect, that it "civilises" international society, and that it ratifies the fundamental distinction between friend and enemy: If this "polis" is once again threatened by "savage barbarians" as 9/11 showed, if international politics is in a state of anarchy as theorists of IR argue, it is necessary to pacify that system in order to secure the future of civilisation.

The complicity of knowledge in the machinations of power should be evident by now. Apart from implicit nods to the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, there were also very direct linkages between the argument of scholars and central policy speeches by leading members of the Bush administration, for instance when the former US Vice President Cheney referred to the late Fouad Ajami to refute scepticism about the ability of the United States to manage Iraq after the invasion. According to Cheney (Full Text of Dick Cheney's speech, 2002, emphasis added):

> Another argument holds that opposing Saddam Hussein would cause even greater troubles in that part of the world, and interfere with the larger war against terror. I believe the opposite is true. Regime change in Iraq would bring about a number of benefits to the region. When the gravest of threats are eliminated, the freedom-loving peoples of the region will have a chance to promote the values that can bring lasting peace. *As for the reaction of the Arab "street," the Middle East expert Professor Fouad Ajami predicts that after liberation, the streets in Basra and Baghdad are "sure to erupt in joy in the same way the throngs in Kabul greeted the Americans."* Extremists in the region would have to rethink their strategy of Jihad. Moderates throughout the region would take heart. And our ability to advance the Israeli-Palestinian peace process would be enhanced, just as it was following the liberation of Kuwait in 1991. The reality is that these times bring not only dangers but also opportunities. In the Middle East, where so many have known only poverty and oppression, terror and tyranny, we look to the day when people can

> live in freedom and dignity and the young can grow up free of the conditions that breed despair, hatred, and violence. ... With our help, a liberated Iraq can be a great nation once again. Iraq is rich in natural resources and human talent, and has unlimited potential for a peaceful, prosperous future. Our goal would be an Iraq that has territorial integrity, a government that is democratic and pluralistic, a nation where the human rights of every ethnic and religious group are recognized and protected. In that troubled land all who seek justice, and dignity, and the chance to live their own lives, can know they have a friend and ally in the United States of America. Great decisions and challenges lie ahead of us. Yet we can and we will build a safer and better world beyond the war on terror.

Here we find the familiar themes that have guided this article. The United States is portrayed as the purveyor of freedom and justice. Conversely, the "other" is deemed to be incapable, troubled and underdeveloped. Cheney quotes Ajami to give his argument more analytical weight. The nexus between knowledge and power is apparent here. Comparable to Lewis and Huntington, Ajami was a trusted source of the neoconservatives in the United States who underwrote the so called "war on terror" and the Presidency of George W. Bush. It should not come as a surprise then, that Ajami was also an adherent to the clash idea. As he wrote in 2008 (The Clash):

> Nearly 15 years on, Huntington's thesis about a civilizational clash seems more compelling to me than the critique I provided at that time. In recent years, for example, the edifice of Kemalism has come under assault, and Turkey has now elected an Islamist to the presidency in open defiance of the military-bureaucratic elite. There has come that "redefinition" that Huntington prophesied. To be sure, the verdict may not be quite as straightforward as he foresaw. The Islamists have prevailed, but their desired destination, or so they tell us, is still Brussels: in that European shelter, the Islamists shrewdly hope they can find protection against the power of the military. ... Huntington had the integrity and the foresight to see the falseness of a borderless world, a world without differences. (He is one of two great intellectual figures who peered into the heart of things and were not taken in by globalism's conceit, Bernard Lewis being the other.)

It continues to be primarily in the "western" discourse that the imperial competition between Persia and the Greek city-states has been turned into an artificial cultural and civilisational marker

between “east” and “west”. It was this imperial rivalry, in other words, that created the historical archives forthe idea of some “clash of civilisations” in the so called “west”its conceptual framework around notions of us-versus-them, its paradoxical emphasis on total difference, its imagination of fixed identities, its objectifying ideology and deceptive cultural coherence.The reason why it is possible for politicians and academics to replant this idea in the 20th century and for their argument to gain such prominence is exactly because it was nurtured within this regime of truth that has been located in those real and imagined early encounters. The idea of a “clash of civilisations” or a battle between civilisation and barbarity is nourished and sustained by this circulation of myths and their institutionalisation. This regime—de-central, heterogeneous, yet structurally salient—has accustomed the general public to accept demarcations between “us” and “them” as a way of introducing order especially during periods of crisis and upheaval (such as after 9/11).

Herodotus was certainly not a fanatic or an extremist. He should be somewhat shielded from being drawn together with contemporary polemicists and their rather more sophisticated methods. By far more divisive than the polemicists of the ancient and medieval period, contemporary proponents of the clash regime avoid drawing things together by, circumventing possibilities of kinship, attraction and affinity. Their argument israther dependenton discrimination, that is, on an epistemology that accentuates conflict with the “other”, who is thought to be absolutely detached from the “self”.By necessity of its exclusionary demeanour,this type of discourse simulates boundaries, contracts the various forms of the other, erects total systems instead of hybrid structures, produces deceptive binaries: Orient versus Occident, barbarian versus civilised, west versus Islam, European versus Muslim (see further Adib-Moghaddam, 2013). This type of discourse is retroactive, not only because of its ideological content; it is in fact and quite directly retroactive.Above everything else, the idea that there are essential, unbridgeable differences between cultures and by extension human beings is simply false. This urge to identify us in strict opposition to others has to be resisted, firstly because it is a false polarisation and secondly because it negates the prospect of dialogue and sustainable peace.

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